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SUBJECT: OFF AGAIN ON AGAIN REGIONAL HEAD OF STATE SUMMIT
ON, THEN OFF, AGAIN

REF: A. 08 BAMAKO 00897
B. BAMAKO 00085

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(U) On February 16 local press in Bamako announced that Mali intended to host President Amadou Toumani Toure's oft-discussed and more oft-postponed Head of State Sahel-Saharan security summit on February 19. According to local media reports, five foreign Heads of State would attend: Algerian President Bouteflika, Burkina President Compaore, Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi, Nigerien President Tandja, and Chadian President Deby. On February 17 French media reported that the leaders of Burkina Faso, Niger, Algeria, Libya and Chad were expected to spend several hours in Bamako.

2.(C) On February 18, however, former Minister of Defense and ex-Head of State Security, Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga, told the Embassy that the Head of State summit had been once again postponed. Maiga, who is one of the summit's many organizers, said Malian authorities had only informed him of the postponement the night before and that several Heads of State had already committed for the date of February 19. Maiga speculated that scheduling problems for one or more regional leaders prompted the delay. Presidential insider Kader Bah told the Embassy on February 18 that the Summit had been "canceled", then amended his description to "postponed" and blamed Qadhafi for the last minute change in plans. Bah also said that there was a problem with Morocco, which was not on the list of those attending, as Morocco wanted participants to formally list the Polisario as a terrorist group.

3.(U) Originally proposed by President Toure in September 2007, the Head of State summit has suffered a number of setbacks which Malian authorities generally attributed to presidential scheduling conflicts. In November 2008 Foreign Ministers from the five nations noted above convened in Bamako to lay the framework for an eventual Head of State meeting (Ref. A). The November 2008 Ministerial meeting produced two documents: a Bamako Declaration and an action plan on peace, security, and development in the region. Signatories to both documents renewed their commitments to combating terrorism, improved information sharing, and the deployment of joint and/or simultaneous military patrols to strengthen cross-border security.

4.(U) According to one generally reliable Malian newspaper, scheduling difficulties and disagreements over the scope of the summit's agenda previously prevented regional Heads of State from gathering in Bamako. The newspaper also noted that President Toure was one of those seeking to limit the scope of the Summit and quoted the President as saying that "it was out of the question to come to discuss the rebellion in (Northern Mali), as each leader manages his own

rebellion." The agreed upon agenda for the summit will include creating a shared space of integrated economic development, exchange, and cooperation. The leaders will discuss boundary security cooperation, including the possibility of creating mixed units to patrol the border regions, or the coordination of simultaneous patrols on each side of the frontier.

Comment: The Malian Trifecta, Almost

4.(C) Had Mali pulled off President Toure's Head of State summit, it would have capped a remarkable two weeks which saw the apparent defeat of Tuareg rebel leader Ibrahim Bahanga (Ref. B) and the negotiated voluntary disarmament of Tuareg rebel factions in Kidal (septel). The unexpected and rapid resolution of Mali's own Tuareg rebellion may have been the catalyst behind President Toure's renewed attempt to convoke his fellow Presidents as President Toure suddenly found himself - whether briefly or on a more long-term basis - in the category of Presidents without an internal rebellion to manage. It may also explain the ad hoc nature of the Summit's organization. News of the Summit's postponement came as no surprise as Mali's media roll-out for the Summit was rather hesitant and none of the normal preparations for welcoming arriving Heads of State were visible in Bamako.

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